

Understanding Effective Public Health Laboratory Practices Across Generations



APRIL 2022

INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2021, The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) Knowledge Management Committee, in partnership with the Workforce Development Committee and the Quality Systems and Analytics (QSA) program, collected feedback to better understand effective generational practices across APHL member laboratories. This effort was to support laboratories in the recruitment and retention of their workforce, a strategic priority for APHL. The survey was distributed to all roles within member laboratories with 482 total responses received. All questions were optional to complete. Survey findings will be used to inform and educate, as well as to develop and distribute new tools and resources to support the public health laboratory community. The survey was broken into four major topic areas:

- Knowledge Retention and Transfer
- Team Building
- Communications Across Generations
- Workplace Culture

DEMOGRAPHICS

Key Findings

- Nearly half of the survey respondents were technical and scientific personnel.
- The respondents were nearly equal split between supervisory and non-supervisory roles.
- Just under half of the respondents were from clinical/infectious diseases.
- 79% of the respondents were born between 1965 and 1996.
- Almost half of the respondents were from laboratories with 101–250 total staff.
- Over 80% of the respondents were from state and territorial PHLs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowledge Retention and Transfer

- Provide trainings on the implementation of the APHL Knowledge Retention Toolkit.
- Provide more resources that support the growth of mentors and coaches in the workplace.
- Encourage more hands-on training.

Team Building

- Provide regular trainings across the organization.
- Develop and support the formation of Communities of Practice (CoP).
- Encourage more opportunities to engage the workforce through icebreakers.

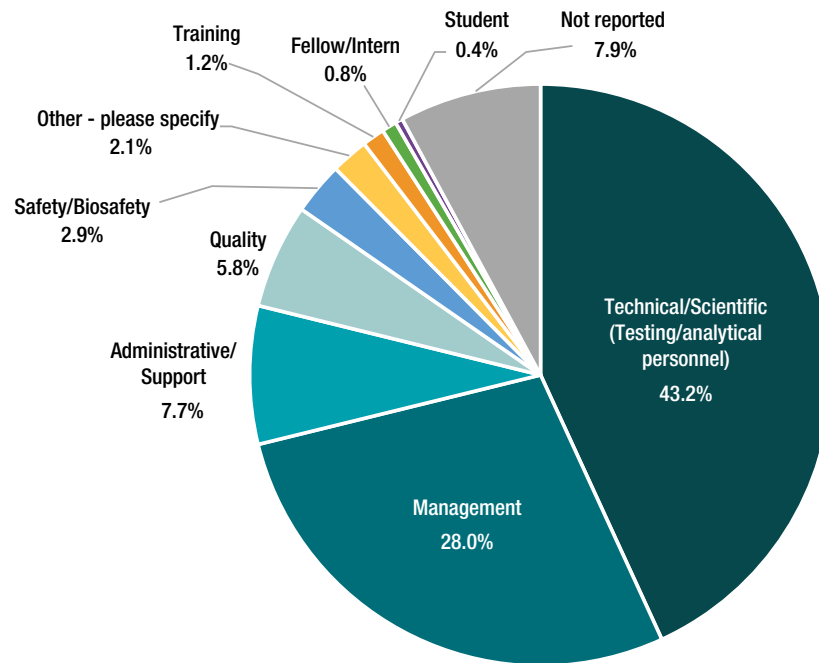
Communication Across Generations

- Develop an inclusive communication plan and policy (ex: when to use email vs. face-to-face).
- Provide trainings on how to have an effective team meeting.
- Recognize the importance of inclusivity when considering different learning styles and communication needs.

Workplace Culture

- Develop and implement an incentive program.
- Host reward and recognition events sponsored by leadership.
- Communicate and align work to organizational values and beliefs.

What is your current professional role? Please choose ONE that most closely matches.



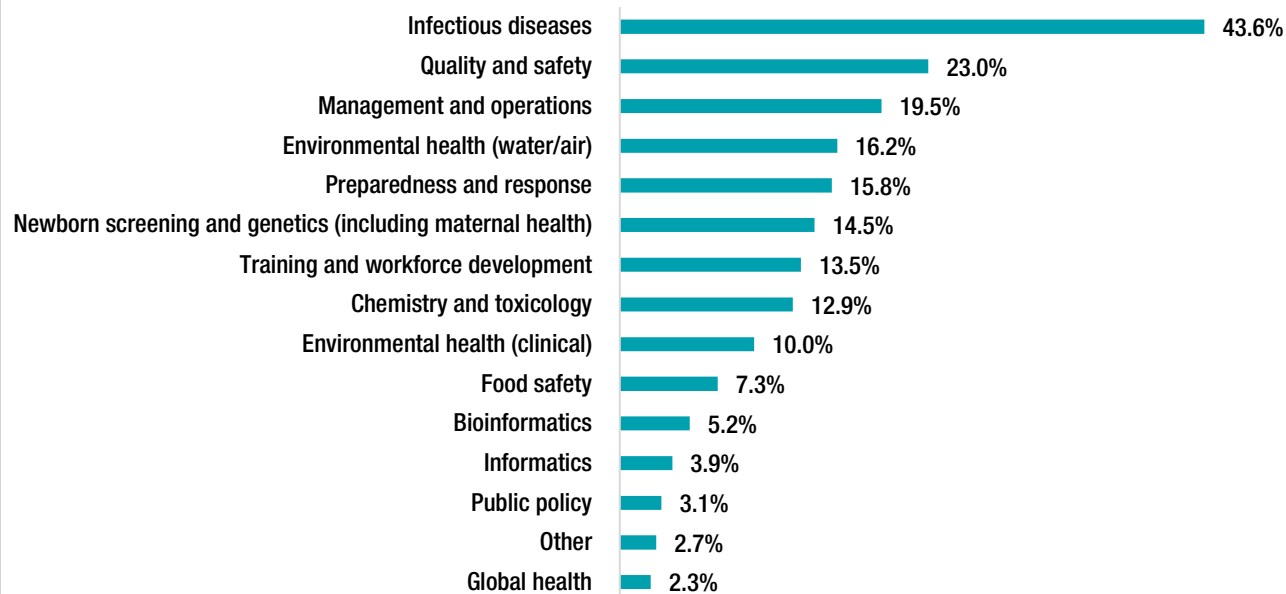
Do you supervise staff or manage a program?

No	46.9%
Yes	44.4%
Not reported	8.7%
Total	100%

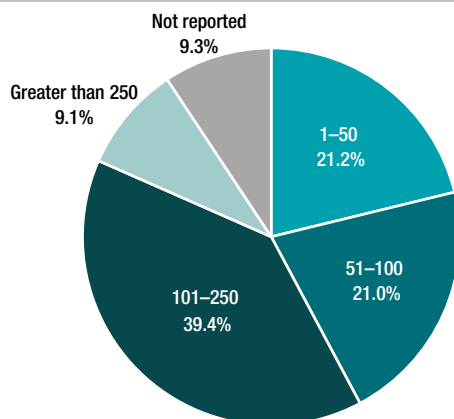
Birth Year

1997 to 2015 (Gen Z)	2.7%
1981 to 1996 (Millennials)	39.4%
1965 to 1980 (Gen X)	32.4%
1946 to 1964 (Baby Boomers)	15.8%
1945 and before (Silent Gen)	0.4%
Not reported	9.3%
Total	100%

What is your area(s) of professional focus? Select all that apply.



How many total people work in your entire laboratory facility? Select a range.



What is your current place of employment? Please choose ONE that most closely matches.

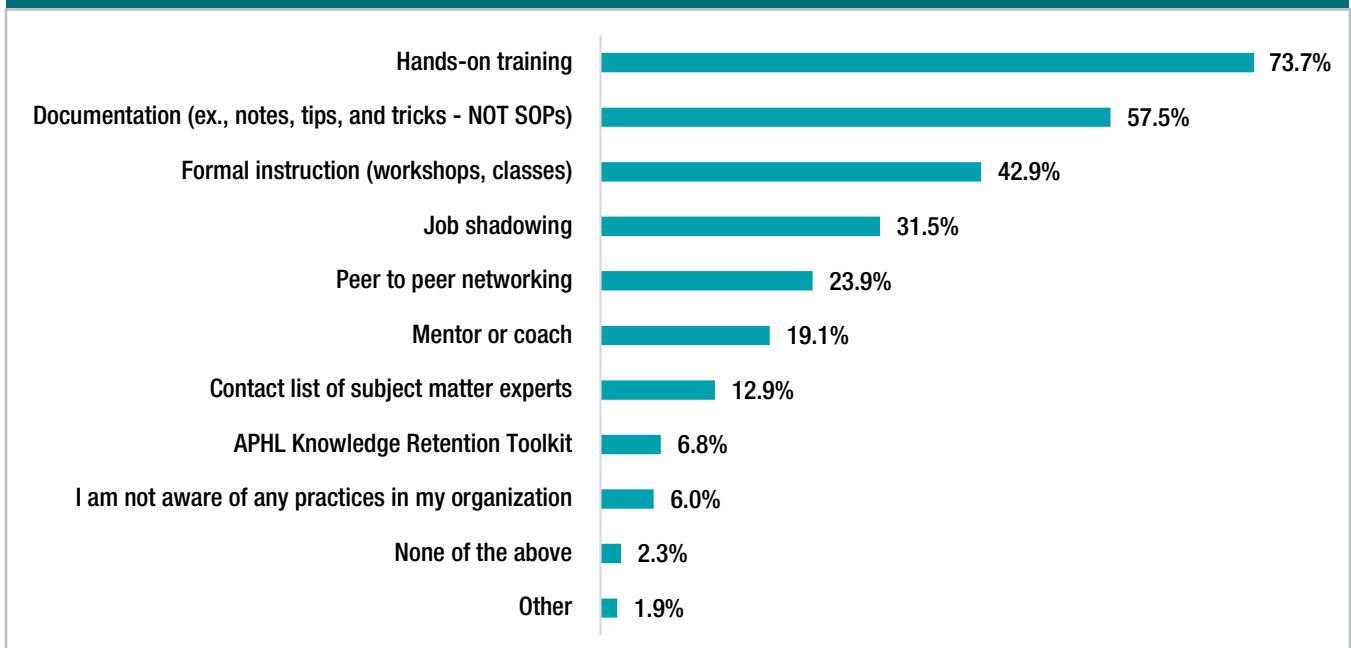
State or territorial public health laboratory	74.3%
Local public health laboratory	13.9%
Environmental laboratory	1.2%
Other	1.2%
Agricultural laboratory	0.6%
Healthcare	0.4%
Industry	0.0%
Academia	0.0%
Retired	0.0%
Not reported	8.3%
Total	100%

KNOWLEDGE RETENTION AND TRANSFER

Key Findings

- The top three knowledge retention practices were hands-on training, documentation, and formal instruction, with hands-on training being the most commonly used (73% of respondents).
- The top three practices recommended to be implemented, that currently are not, were mentoring/coaching, creating contact lists of subject matter experts (subject matter experts, and implementing APHL's knowledge retention toolkit, with mentoring/coaching being the most commonly recommended (37% of respondents).
- Communication was the most commonly cited obstacle, followed by learning styles and workplace culture.

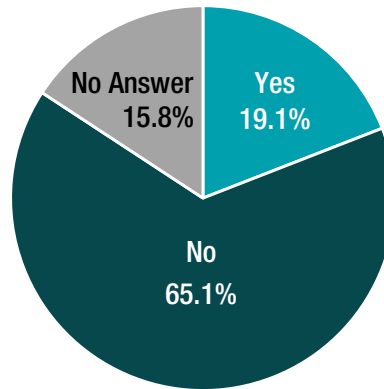
Aside from SOPs, what other knowledge retention practices have been implemented in your organization? Select all that apply.



What knowledge transfer practices, that are currently NOT performed in your organization, do you think should be implemented? Select all that apply.

Mentor or coach	36.9%
Contact list of subject matter experts	33.6%
APHL Knowledge Retention Toolkit	27.4%
Formal instruction (workshops, classes)	24.7%
Peer to peer networking	24.3%
Job shadowing	23.2%
Documentation (ex., notes, tips, and tricks - NOT Standard Operating Procedures)	15.6%
Hands-on training	7.7%
Other	3.5%

Are you aware of the knowledge retention tools available on Aphi.org?



What are the obstacles to effective knowledge transfer between generations in your organization? Select all that apply.

Communication	55.4%
Learning styles	44.6%
Workplace culture	43.8%
Leadership engagement	39.6%
Personality	36.7%
Creating a plan of action	34.4%
Other	12.9%

Ranking of existing practices that are most effective for knowledge transfer between generations:

1	Hands-on training
2	Documentation (ex., notes, tips, and tricks - NOT SOPs)
3	Formal instruction (workshops, classes)
4	Job shadowing
5	Peer to peer networking
6	Mentor or coach
7	Contact list of subject matter experts
8	APHL Knowledge Retention Toolkit
9	Other

TEAM BUILDING

Key Findings

- The top three team building practices were cross-training, committees/workgroups, and regular training, with cross-training being the most commonly used (36% of respondents).
- The top three practices recommended to be implemented, that currently are not, were regular training, forming communities of practice, and implementing icebreakers, with regular training being the most commonly recommended (30% of respondents).
- Communication was the most commonly cited obstacle, followed by workplace culture.

What team building practices have been implemented in your organization? Select all that apply.



What team building practices, that are currently NOT performed in your organization, do you think should be implemented? Select all that apply.

Regular trainings	30.3%
Forming communities of practices	27.4%
Ice breakers	25.1%
Committees and workgroups	21.6%
Cross training	17.6%
Projects	17.4%
Other	4.6%

What are the obstacles to effective team building between generations in your organization? Select all that apply.

Communication	51.7%
Workplace culture	45.4%
Personality	39.8%
Leadership engagement	36.7%
Learning styles	34.9%
Creating a plan of action	25.3%
Other	7.5%

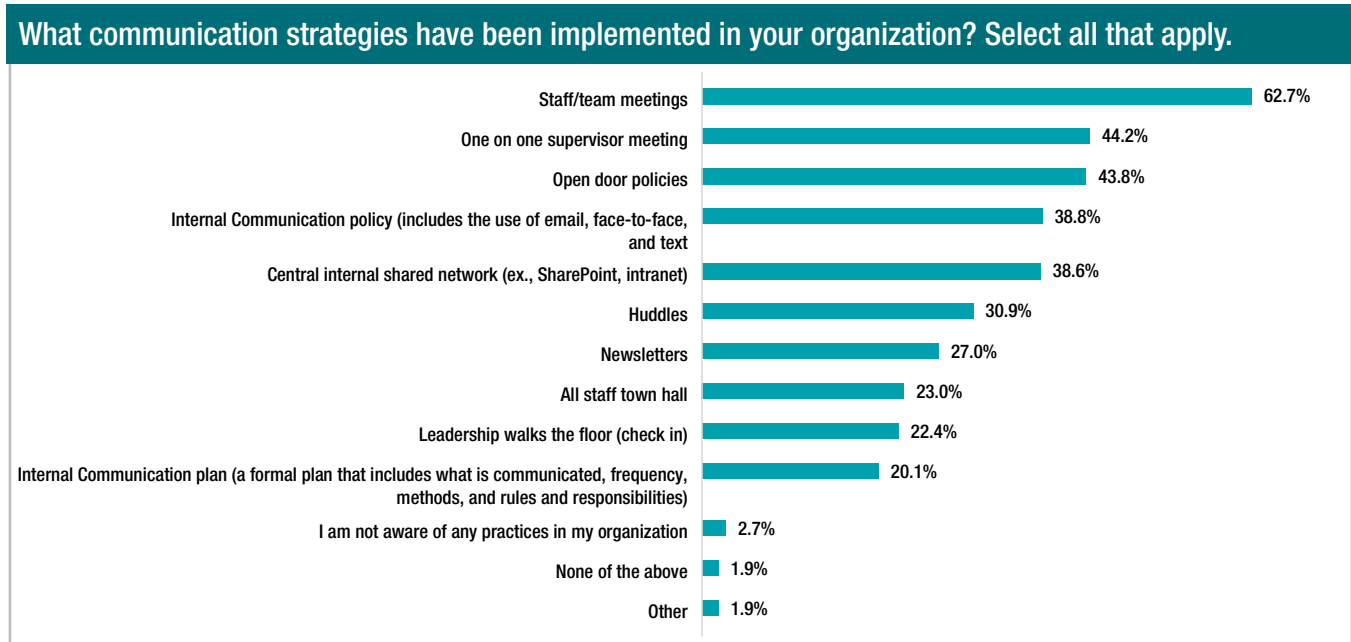
Ranking of existing practices that are most effective for knowledge transfer between generations:

1	Cross training
2	Committees and workgroups
3	Projects
4	Regular trainings
5	Ice breakers
6	Other
7	Forming communities of practices

COMMUNICATION ACROSS GENERATIONS

Key Findings

- The top three communication across generation practices were staff/team meetings, one-on-one supervisor meetings and open door policies, with staff/team meetings being the most commonly used (63% of respondents).
- The top three practices recommended to be implemented, that currently are not, were leadership walking the floor, and establishing a communications plan and policy, with leadership walking the floor as being the most commonly recommended (29% of respondents).
- Communication styles was the most commonly cited obstacle, followed by workplace culture.



What communication practices, that are currently NOT performed in your organization, do you think should be implemented? Select all that apply.

Communication Practice	Percentage
Leadership walks the floor (check in)	28.6%
Internal Communication plan (a formal plan that includes what is communicated, frequency, methods, and rules and responsibilities)	26.8%
Internal Communication policy (includes the use of email, face to face, and text)	18.3%
All staff town hall	15.6%
One on one supervisor meeting	13.1%
Huddles	12.4%
Open door policies	12.4%
Newsletters	11.4%
Staff/team meetings	9.8%
Central internal shared network (ex. SharePoint, intranet)	9.5%
Other	2.5%

Obstacles to effective communication between generations in your organization. Select all that apply.

Communication styles	53.1%
Workplace culture	42.3%
Leadership engagement	36.5%
Personality	35.1%
Learning styles	31.3%
Technology	29.3%
Creating a plan of action	20.5%
Other	4.1%

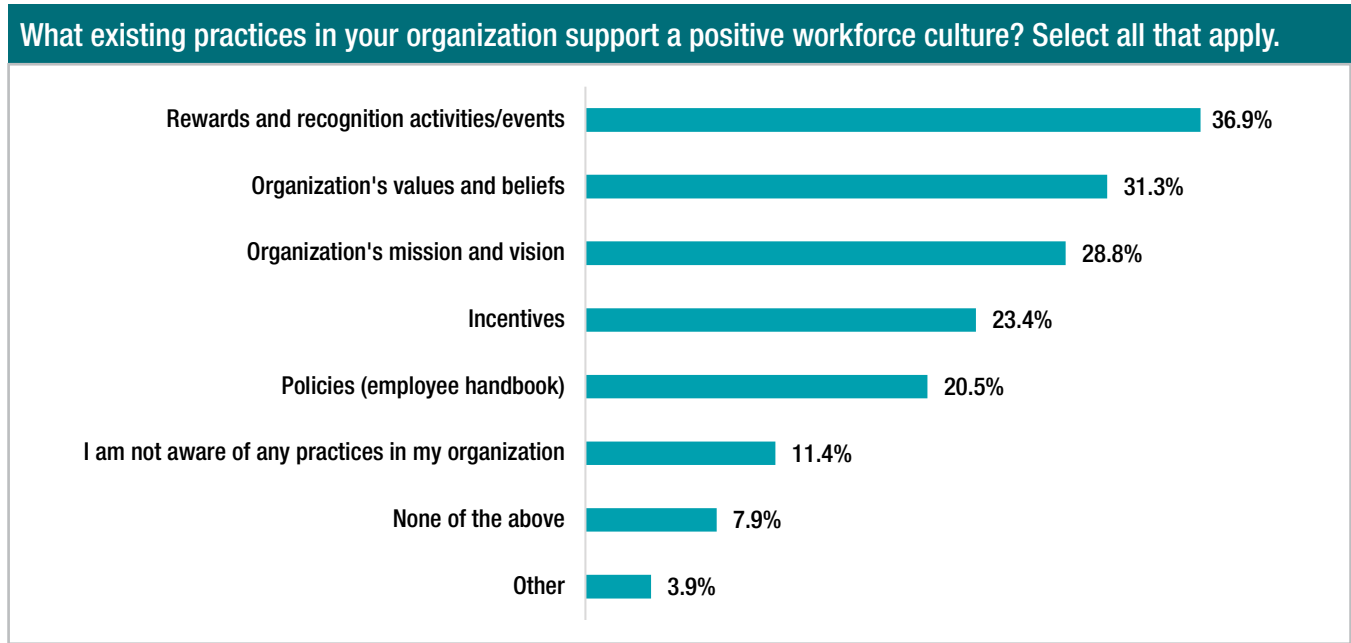
Ranking of existing practices that are most effective for knowledge transfer between generations:

1	Staff/team meetings
2	Open door policies
3	One on one supervisor meeting
4	Internal Communication policy (includes the use of email, face to face, and text)
5	Central internal shared network (ex., SharePoint, intranet)
6	Huddles
7	Newsletters
8	Internal Communication plan (a formal plan that includes what is communicated, frequency, methods, and rules and responsibilities)
9	Leadership walks the floor (check in)
10	All staff town hall
11	Other

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Key Findings

- The top three strategies that support workplace culture were reward/recognition activities/events, organization’s values and beliefs, and the organization’s mission and vision, with reward/recognition activities/events being the most commonly used (37% of respondents).
- The top three practices recommended to be implemented, that currently are not, were incentives, reward/recognition events, and organizational values and beliefs, with incentives being the most commonly recommended (31% of respondents).
- Leadership engagement was the most commonly cited obstacle, followed by communications and workplace culture.



What workplace culture practices, that are currently NOT performed in your organization, do you think should be implemented? Select all that apply.

Incentives	31.1%
Rewards and recognition activities/events	25.1%
Organization's values and beliefs	11.8%
Organization's mission and vision	9.5%
Policies (employee handbook)	8.3%
Other	6.2%

Obstacles to supporting positive workplace culture between generations in your organization. Select all that apply.

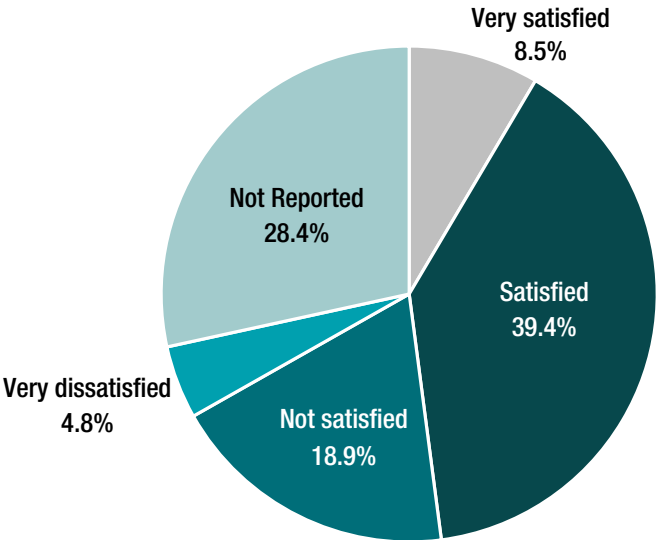
Leadership engagement	63.3%
Communication	60.8%
Workplace culture	60.4%
Personality	49.4%
Learning styles	34.5%
Creating a plan of action	33.5%
Other	6.3%

Ranking of workplace culture events that are most beneficial:

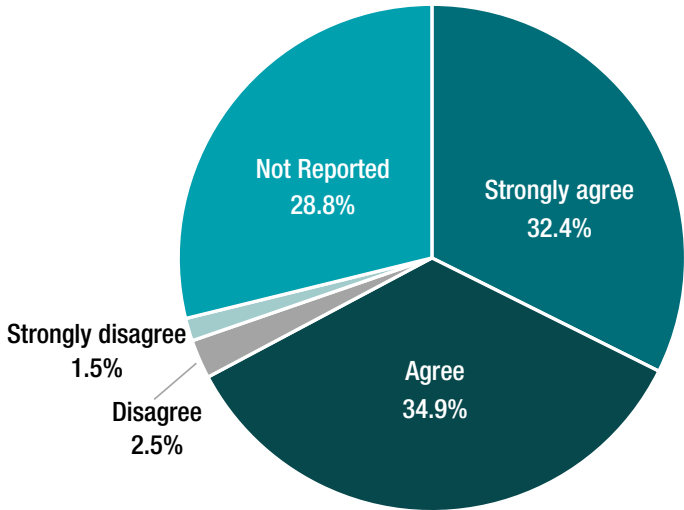
1	Rewards and recognition activities/events
2	Annual organization wide events (lab week, employee appreciation, walks/runs) of different cultural holidays/celebrations
3	Celebrations (anniversaries, birthdays, and other significant personal events)
4	Potlucks
5	Contests/games (scavenger hunts, door decorating)
6	All staff meetings/town halls
7	Community/Volunteer events (Relay For Life, dance marathon)
8	Clubs (bike club, volleyball club, golf club, walking club)
9	External after work activities

OVERALL ENGAGEMENT

How satisfied are you with your overall level of engagement within your organization?



Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: “The work I perform aligns with the mission, vision, and values of my organization.”



The survey was a voluntary convenience sampling that was self-administered, online and anonymous. The responses do not necessarily represent all of the target population.

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Association of Public Health Laboratories

The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) works to strengthen laboratory systems serving the public's health in the US and globally. APHL's member laboratories protect the public's health by monitoring and detecting infectious and foodborne diseases, environmental contaminants, terrorist agents, genetic disorders in newborns and other diverse health threats.

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